THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS CENTER FOR AFRICA

Closing the Divide

A Comprehensive Analysis of Social Protection in Africa

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Abbreviations

AU. *African Union*

BDS. *Business Development Support*

CPI. *Corruption Perceptions Index*

CSR. Corporate Social Responsibility

GDP. *Gross Domestic Product*

GNI. Gross National Income

ILO. *International Labour Organization, International Labour Organization*

LCA. *Life-cycle approach*

LMPs. *Labour Market Policies*

NSPF. *National Social Protection Framework*

NSPP. onal Social Protection Policy

NSPS. *National Social Protection Strategy*

PPP. *Purchasing Power Parity*

SAP. *Structural Adjustement Programme*

SDG. *Sustainable Development Goals*

UN. *United Nations*

VNR. *Voluntary National Reviews*

WFP. *World Food Programme*

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Executive Summary

Global poverty, experiencing a consistent decline over the past three decades, encountered unforeseen setbacks caused by increasing climate-related hazards, armed conflicts, the Covid-19 Pandemic, and global inflation. These challenges led to a renewed surge in poverty, particularly concentrated in Africa, posing a significant impediment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1), which aims to “End Poverty in all its forms.”

One crucial indicator for reducing poverty is SDG1.3, which encompass the implementation of robust social protection measures, an area where Africa lags with one of the lowest coverage rates of 17.4% of the population behind. However, not only the SDGs aim to expand social protection measures, but also the African Union's aspiration for the establishment of legally prescribed and affordable social security systems. Despite extensive efforts, research on social protection in Africa remains fragmented, emphasizing the need for updated analysis to identify gaps and challenges comprehensively.

This report addresses this need by providing an in-depth overview of successes and challenges in social protection policies and measures. Highlighting the significance of addressing emerging challenges, the report provides the fundamental data for targeted efforts to alleviate poverty, secure sustainable financing, and fortify social protection measures against external shocks.

The assessment aligns with SDG1.3, utilizing a diverse range of data sources, including national and international documents, policies, reports, constitutions, and the 2023 SDG Index and Dashboards. Insights from Voluntary National Reviews from 2018 to 2023 and statistical trend analyses, employing ILOs indicators such as the Headcount Poverty Rate and Effective Coverage of Social protection Measures, offer a nuanced macro perspective on social protection. In addition, a broad range exploratory review of VNRs revealed the emerging challenges of African countries.

Despite the potential of social protection measures to contribute to SDG 1, Africa currently exhibits one of the lowest levels of social protection globally, underscoring the imperative for effective implementation. This disparity is evident in both access and legal coverage, with financing challenges significantly impacting the latter. The prevailing state of social protection in Africa manifests in low legal coverage and limited access, with only 17.4% of the population benefiting from effective coverage. According to the concept of the Social Protection Floors, social assistance is a key pillar to lift the most vulnerable groups out of poverty. Therefore, the focus of non-contributory social assistance through cash or in-kind transfers benefit in particular old-age persons and children. Even though social assistance programs account for the highest percentage of social protection measures with 77%, African governments focus primarily on compulsory

and voluntary insurance. This strategy is questionable, as only formally employed people benefit from formal insurances. As a result, approximately 86% of the working population are left behind.

The decision of focusing mainly on insurance schemes can be explained in the level of financing non-contributory social protection measures. An analysis of social protection spending as a percentage of GDP reveals substantial variation across income groups, with upper-middle-income countries allocating 4.1% of the GDP, while low-income economies allocate a mere 0.9%. On average, Africa dedicates 3.8% of its GDP to social protection—a stark contrast to Europe and Central Asia, which allocate 17.4%. The discrepancy between the spending on social protection and effective coverage underscores the urgency for innovative financing strategies. Especially in the face of macroeconomic uncertainties exacerbated by events such as the Covid-19 crisis, operational challenges, including distribution obstacles, further compound the implementation of social protection measures. While focusing predominantly on the public sector due to data heterogeneity in the private sector, the report underscores the need for partnerships, emphasizing the public-private collaboration that is integral as a first step to a consistent social protection system.

The adverse impact of limited social protection is tangible by those outside formal work relationships, especially women, children, and persons with severe disabilities. Notably, countries such as Sudan and Somalia, grappling with high displacement rates, endeavor to broaden social protection target groups to encompass displaced individuals. For this reason, financing systems must be created on the fundament of differentiated research on the target groups that can sustainably maintain social protection systems. SDG1.3 especially emphasizes on an intersectional gender perspective on social protection. However, this aspect is not specifically considered in reports or VNRs and therefore gender-sensitive data are still not sufficient on a continental level. Thus, a comprehensive gender sensitive perspective is also not presented in this report.

In the course of the analysis, it becomes clear that there is no universal social protection system for all countries. It is advisable to consider already functioning systems as benchmarks, but to adapt them to the socio-economic circumstances of each country. Earmarked financing for social protection is a must given obstinate levels of poverty that predominate. In conclusion, this analysis serves as a call to action for policymakers, urging a comprehensive reevaluation of existing frameworks to foster equitable and sustainable social protection systems in Africa.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the past three decades, global poverty has exhibited a declining trend when assessed from a global perspective. Nevertheless, the emergence of the Covid-19 Pandemic marked a significant setback in the collective pursuit of alleviating poverty (World Bank 2022; Abay et al. 2023; UNDP and AU 2019). The recent heightened droughts and floods have adversely impacted individuals, while armed conflicts have been on the rise over the past two decades (ACLED 2023). Furthermore, the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine has contributed to global inflation, which resulted in food insecurity due to increasing food prices (World Bank 2022). The rising risks present an unparalleled challenge to achieving the 2030 global poverty target, a goal for which a number of countries mainly in Africa are already deviating from its intended course (SDGCA 2020).

Despite expectations of a decline in extreme poverty rates, the data reveals that the number of individuals living in extreme poverty increased by 11% in 2020 (World Bank 2022). However, global poverty is not limited to extreme poverty, why it is worth taking other poverty lines and concepts into account. The poverty line for the lower-middle-income countries, of which 24 have been classified in Africa by the World Bank, is at US$3.65. Global poverty increased in these countries by about 1.3 percentage points – from 23.5% in 2019 to 24.8% in 2020. Furthermore, in Sub-Saharan Africa, just over half of all households experienced multidimensional poverty. To achieve the goal of a poverty rate of 3% by 2030, Sub-Saharan Africa would require a GDP growth rate that is about eight times higher than historical rates between 2010 and 2019 (World Bank 2022; 2023b). At the current trend, poverty in 2030 is likely to be concentrated in Africa (SDGCA 2020).

The first Sustainable Development Goal (SDG1) encompasses strategies to address and prevent extreme poverty globally. The aim to "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" consists of the comprehensive implementation of social protection measures. In particular SDG Target 1.3 calls on all countries to implement national appropriate social protection mechanisms and measures including social protection floors, to end poverty by 2030. Social protection also receives explicit recognition in the African Union's (AU) 2063 Agenda: The Africa We Want. Within the AU's Aspiration, there exists a clear commitment to legally establish affordable social protection systems, thereby ensuring a higher standard of living.

However, Africa currently exhibits one of the lowest rates of Social protection coverage worldwide and remains off track towards meeting the 2030 targets (Sachs et al. 2023).

Despite the extensive efforts of numerous researchers and organizations to furnish comprehensive data on Social protection, research in the African context remains fragmented and inconclusive (Mulugeta Woldegiorgis 2022; Abay et al. 2023). Consequently, there is a compelling need for an updated analysis to corroborate existing findings and assess the developmental trajectories outlined in previous studies on social protection. The primary objective of this report is to offer a thorough analysis of measures and social protection coverage, with the intent to pinpoint existing gaps and challenges. By conducting an in-depth examination of prevailing trends and the current status, this report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of both the successes and challenges inherent in Social protection policies and measures (UNDP and AU 2019).

1.2 Methodology

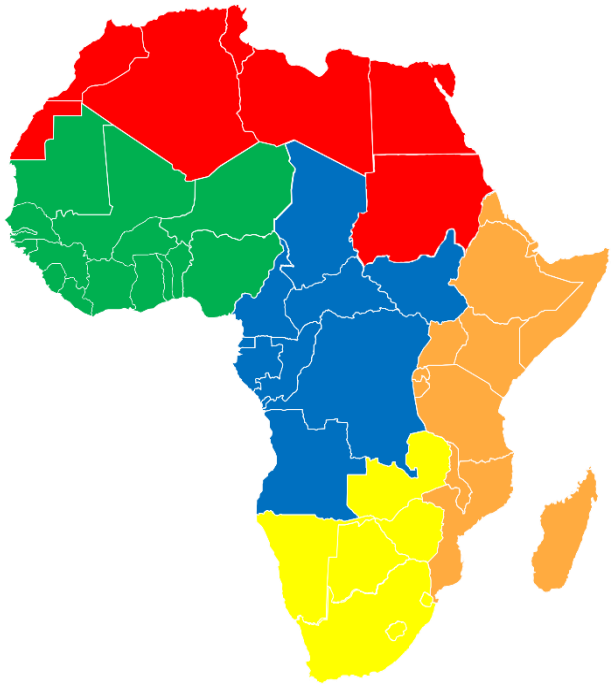
The scope of this report encompasses 54[1] countries on the African continent. In accordance with the African Union's country classification system, the report categorizes these nations into five distinct geographical sub-regions: North Africa, West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, and Southern Africa (UNDP and African Union 2019).

To evaluate the current extent of social protection coverage, encapsulated in SDG1 and AU Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1, secondary data was collected from reviews of both national and international resources. These include among others the National Social protection Policies and Strategies, Social protection Reports, Voluntary National Reviews, Constitutions and the global SDG Index and Dashboard report for 2023. In order to gain an additional insight into the reasons that led to various trends, an exploratory review of the causative factors was carried out using the mentioned sources. The primary focus was on the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) (UN 2023a) submitted by member states from 2018 to 2023, as they form the foundation for analysing implementation efforts at the national level. Therefore, various indicators, such as the Headcount Poverty Rate, the Effective Coverage of at least one social protection Measure, and the Percentage of the Population who is legally covered, were utilized for an inferential

[1] Notably, this report excludes territories classified as overseas territories of European countries from its analysis.

statistical trend analysis. Case studies are additionally employed to showcase best practices and illustrate lessons learned.

Box 1: African Union's Country Classification



North Africa:
Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, Western Sahara

West Africa:
Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

Central Africa:
Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic Congo, Republic Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Sao Tome and Principe

East Africa:
Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda

Southern Africa:
Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe

However, data gaps remain a major challenge for analysing the process of achieving SDG1.3 in Africa. It is important to note that the majority of the data was collected before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most of the data is outdated and not fully available for all countries, for instance of South Sudan. Even if the data were comprehensive enough to measure progress toward SDG1.3, it is important to recognize that it may not provide a complete picture of overall progress.

Although the active participation of the formal private sector in various social protection programs is of importance, this report predominantly maintains its focus on the public sector. This choice is informed by the often opaque and heterogenic nature of data surrounding private sector initiatives. Consequently, the data are not suitable for a comparative analysis.

1.3 Report Structure

This report aims to explore the landscape of social protection in the African context, focusing on the implementation of measures and policies. Chapter 2 serves as a foundation for the comprehensive analysis presented in this report. It delves into the social protection Framework, with a particular emphasis on SDG1.3. This chapter encompass the contextual framework within which social protection in Africa is examined. Furthermore, the social protection floor of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the impact of social protection on other SDGs is explored, providing context to the subsequent findings. This framework offers a structured lens through which discussions and findings can be interpreted.

Building upon the conceptual and contextualized groundwork, a continental trend analysis of social protection in Africa is conducted in Chapter 3. The focus on the influential factors such as Poverty and Social protection Spending, offering an overview of the current status and impact of Social. The diverse array of social protection instruments, that are explored in this chapter, shed light on the priorities set by governments. Additionally, the section analysis the effective coverage of the specific target groups for these measures and how the current status of achieving a universal social protection scheme is.

Chapter 4 unravels emerging challenges that have surfaced in the African social protection landscape, explicitly emphasized in the VNRs. From the persistent challenge of poverty to the intricacies of financing, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the complexities of the distribution chain, this section comprehensively addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by the region.

Drawing upon the insights gathered from the preceding sections, the conclusion captures the essence of the report. It synthesizes key findings, highlights overarching trends, and offers a concise reflection on the implications of the research for policymakers, practitioners, and academics.

2 Framework for Social protection

2.1 Social protection in the African context

Social protection, often interchangeably referred to as social security in the broader literature, constitutes a comprehensive framework comprising a range of measures strategically designed to alleviate and prevent poverty across the entirety of an individual's life (ILO 2021a).

Well before the introduction of formal institutional protection schemes in Africa, the responsibility for the care and well-being of vulnerable individuals rested largely with their families. Historically, there have been three distinct waves in the implementation of formal social protection measures over the past 150 years. Africa saw the introduction of its first government-induced social protection measures during the colonial period, primarily benefiting employees of colonial powers in the public sector who had access to social insurance programs. Following independence, some governments made efforts to expand these measures, but the vulnerable population remained largely excluded. The second wave of social protection initiatives arrived in the 1990s, immediately after the era of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in the development sector. During this period, international development partners, such as the UN, played a pivotal role in advocating for and implementing targeted social protection measures, such as Cash Transfer programs. The third and most recent wave of social protection scheme implementation has emerged over the past decade. What sets this wave apart from the previous two is twofold. Firstly, there is a growing emphasis on framing Social protection as a fundamental right, with a push to enshrine it in national constitutions (ILO 2022; UNDP and AU 2019). In Africa, this progress is evident in the elaboration of policies by the AU. Since its establishment, three key policy positions have been issued: a Social Policy Framework for Africa in 2008, a social protection Plan for Informal Economy and Rural Workers (SPIREWORK) in 2011, and the Addis Ababa Declaration on Social protection for Inclusive Development in 2015 (Seekings 2019). While only a few African countries have enacted such legislation thus far, the momentum is steadily increasing (UNDP and AU 2019).

Secondly, prominent international organizations like ILO, the UN, and the World Bank are actively promoting a universal approach to Social protection, aiming to make these schemes accessible to all (UNDP and AU 2019; ILO 2022; 2021a; 2015). To achieve this universalism, social protection schemes are structured around two fundamental pillars. The first pillar encompasses social insurance or contributory schemes tailored to mitigate risks associated with health-related issues, disabilities, unemployment, and the challenges of old age. The second pillar, known as social assistance, incorporates public transfers

Figure 1: Targets and Indicators of SDG1 in regard of Social Protection

Target 1.3

Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

Indicator 1.3.1

Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable

Source: UN 2023

directed towards eligible individuals facing economic deprivation (Mulugeta Woldegiorgis 2022). These measures are primarily founded on well-defined national policies that are systematically disbursed in a non-emergency, routine, and anticipatable manner. They encompass a basic set of essential social rights and transfers, both in cash and in kind, along with ensuring geographical and financial access to fundamental services such as water, education, food, or housing to enhance livelihoods (Randhawa 2022). The primary objective is to alleviate crises and shocks experienced by vulnerable individuals, including children, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, the elderly, and those in the working-age population. The aspiration for a high standard of living, quality of life, and overall well-being for all, as outlined in the African Agenda 2063, directly aligns with SDG1.

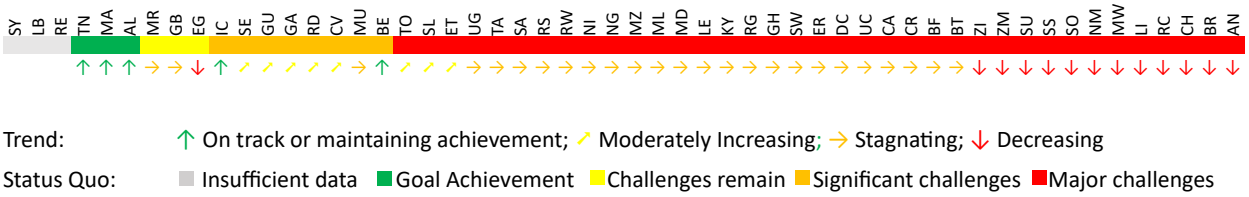

SY LB RE TN MA AL MR GB EG IC SE GU GA RD CV MU BE TO SL ET UG TA SA RS RW NI NG MZ ML MD LE KY RG GH SW ER DC UC CA CR BF BT ZI ZM SU SS SO NM MW LI RC CH BR AN
Trend: ↑ On track or maintaining achievement; ↗ Moderately Increasing; → Stagnating; ↓ Decreasing
Status Quo: Insufficient data Goal Achievement Challenges remain Significant challenges Major challenges

Figure 2: SDG Index Goal 1 of all African countries

Source: SDGCA 2020; Abbreviation according IAU 2023.

The 2023 SDG Index and dashboard for Africa reveal significant challenges faced by 38 African countries in achieving the corresponding 2030 target. Alarmingly, only three countries are currently on track to meet SDG1[2] (s. figure 2). The second continental AU 2063 implementation report underscores the underperformance of Goal 1. In 2021, this goal achieved an overall score of 31%, marking a substantial

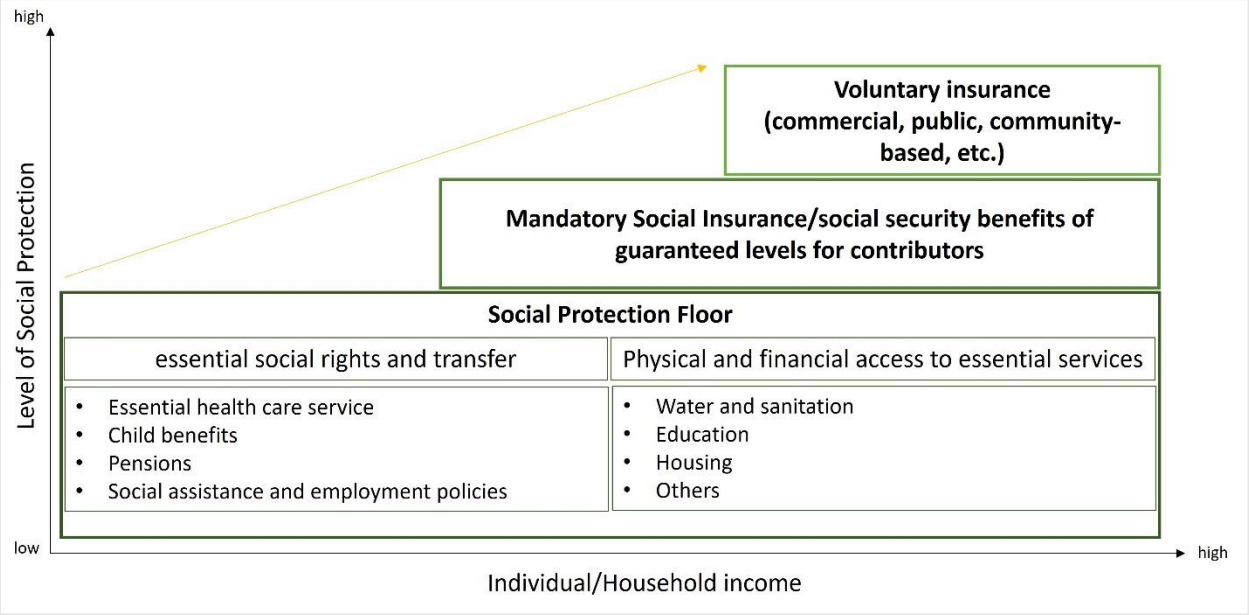
[2] Tunisia, Mauritius and Algeria.

decline from the 56% recorded in 2019 (SDGCA and SDSN 2023). The report suggests that one contributing factor to this decline in performance could be the global macroeconomic stress induced by the Covid-19 pandemic (AUC and AUDA-NEPAD 2022; ILO 2022; SDGCA and SDSN 2023; World Bank 2022). According to Abay et al. (2023), social protection programs not only enhance productivity but also play a vital role in contributing to economic and political stability. These programs also help mitigate the negative social consequences associated with rapid structural changes, including addressing challenges related to migration, unemployment, increasing inequalities, and pandemics (Abay et al. 2023).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

For a long time, social protection was reserved exclusively for formally employed workers, who had access to compulsory contributory insurance through labour law. It was assumed that the incentive of social security would encourage more people to work in the formal sector. However, this formalization of the world of work did not take place, instead the number of workers in the informal sector increased. Consequently, large parts of the population continue to receive no social protection through the government (ILO 2015; Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021).

Figure 3: Social protection Staircase Model



Source: Author's computation based on ILO (2015)

For that reason, the ILO and the World Bank have established a rights-based approach for social protection founded on four principles: fostering solidarity among population groups, ensuring no one is left behind, engaging in social dialogue, and upholding universal coverage and non-discrimination (ILO 2021). Affirming a right to social protection signifies that the state, as the duty-bearer, is legally bound to safeguard the well-being of all individuals within its jurisdiction, acting in their capacity as rights-holders, against the adversities of poverty and vulnerability (Devereux 2017). The application of the social rights approach is designed to empower citizens to assert their entitlements from the state. Importantly, these rights extend beyond the category of the 'deserving poor' to encompass all members of society, embracing the principle of 'universal coverage. It is crucial to note that the assertion of these rights doesn't necessarily guarantee that every individual will receive a Social protection benefit (Stern Plaza et al. 2019).

The ILO's Social protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), and the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), serve as cornerstones for the development of universal social protection systems. Universal social protection however does not stop at a basic level of protection. Recommendation No. 202 also sets out that countries should progressively ensure higher levels of social security for as many people as possible and as soon as possible (Stern Plaza et al. 2019; ILO 2022; 2021a).

Therefore, this report employs the social protection Floors framework to assess the current state of Social protection in Africa. Aligned with the universal access paradigm, social protection Floors aim to alleviate poverty, vulnerability, and social exclusion as according to the SDG1. These measures are designed to guarantee, at a minimum, that all individuals in need have access to four essential social protection guarantees:

- access to essential goods and services, health care, including maternity care;
- basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;
- basic income security for persons in active age who do not earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability;
- basic income security for older persons.

Social protection schemes, according to the staircase model, should not only cover specific life stages but provide security across the entire life cycle. The life-cycle approach (LCA) enables the identification of appropriate social protection instruments for diverse demographic groups and sources of vulnerability. It is of importance that the development of social protection policies and the corresponding systems consider the specific nuances and particularities of each nation. Several nations, including Lesotho, Mali,

Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zanzibar, have already incorporated the LCA into their social protection strategies (UNDP and African Union 2019; Shriwise, Kentikelenis, and Stuckler 2020).

As previously highlighted, social protection is fundamentally structured around two key pillars: social assistance and social insurance. These pillars are the fundamental operational measures of essential social rights and transfers, as illustrated by the staircase model (s. figure 3). Consequently, this report will primarily concentrate on elucidating transfers and rights.

The Social protection Floor is predominantly constituted by social assistance, with the overarching objective of guaranteeing a baseline standard of living for all individuals through the tangible receipt of benefits (Gentilini et al. 2022). In contrast, social insurance is designed to address major, covariant, or catastrophic risks that could affect a large segment of the population or result in high costs that might jeopardize their quality of life during certain stages of life. Unlike regular transfers or in-kind support, social insurance only comes into play when damage or harm occurs. These risks can originate from various sources, including natural disasters, health-related issues, life-cycle events (such as birth, old age, and death), social and political conflicts, as well as economic shocks. This dual concept of coverage sets apart universality in social protection from risk-based approaches commonly seen in healthcare systems (Stern Plaza et al. 2019). Due to this distinction and the focus of this report on SDG1, rather than SDG3, healthcare is not addressed as a component of social protection within this report.

2.3 Social protection and SDGs

Investing in social protection not only aligns with the aspirations of SDG1 but also generates positive spillover effects across other SDGs, thereby advancing the broader Agenda 2030. Achieving an effective and universal social protection system necessitates a comprehensive approach, calling for close collaboration among diverse stakeholders, both within a country's borders and beyond (SDG17). This collaborative effort encompasses various measures, including cash and in-kind transfers, as well as initiatives to enhance the labor force, all contributing to a more secure living situation for citizens.

In a detailed examination, monetary benefits play a pivotal role in improving access to food and fostering a more balanced nutritional diet, directly supporting the objectives of SDG2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG3 (Good Health and Well-being). Notably, numerous African countries include contributions to school fees within their social protection measures, aiming to remove financial barriers to education and thus

contributing to SDG4 (Quality Education). Furthermore, the incorporation of a universal health scheme into the social protection system addresses health-related goals (ILO 2021b).

Several studies have consistently highlighted the direct link between social protection and the reduction of income inequalities and unequal access to opportunities, aligning with SDG10 (ILO 2021c; Mulugeta Woldegiorgis 2022; Cerra, Loayza, and Lama 2021; Osabohien et al. 2020). More specifically, SDG10.4 and SDG5.4 emphasize the positive impact of social protection policies on achieving greater equality, both in terms of gender and income. Social protection not only fosters economic growth but also promotes decent work, innovation, and inclusive industrialization by investing in human capital, reducing insecurity for workers, and injecting cash into communities. For instance, Asia and the Pacific, with a labor force comprising up to 60% in the informal sector, demonstrate the positive outcomes of such investments. It has been observed that every dollar invested in social protection multiplies by 1.3 to 2.4 when cash enters communities, showcasing the cascading positive effects of such initiatives. To what extent this applies to Africa remains to be seen. However, cash transfers in particular are also showing numerous successes in Africa.

Figure 4: Collection of the SDGs

1 NO POVERTY
2 ZERO HUNGER
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
4 QUALITY EDUCATION
5 GENDER EQUALITY
6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION
14 LIFE BELOW WATER
15 LIFE ON LAND
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Source: UN 2023

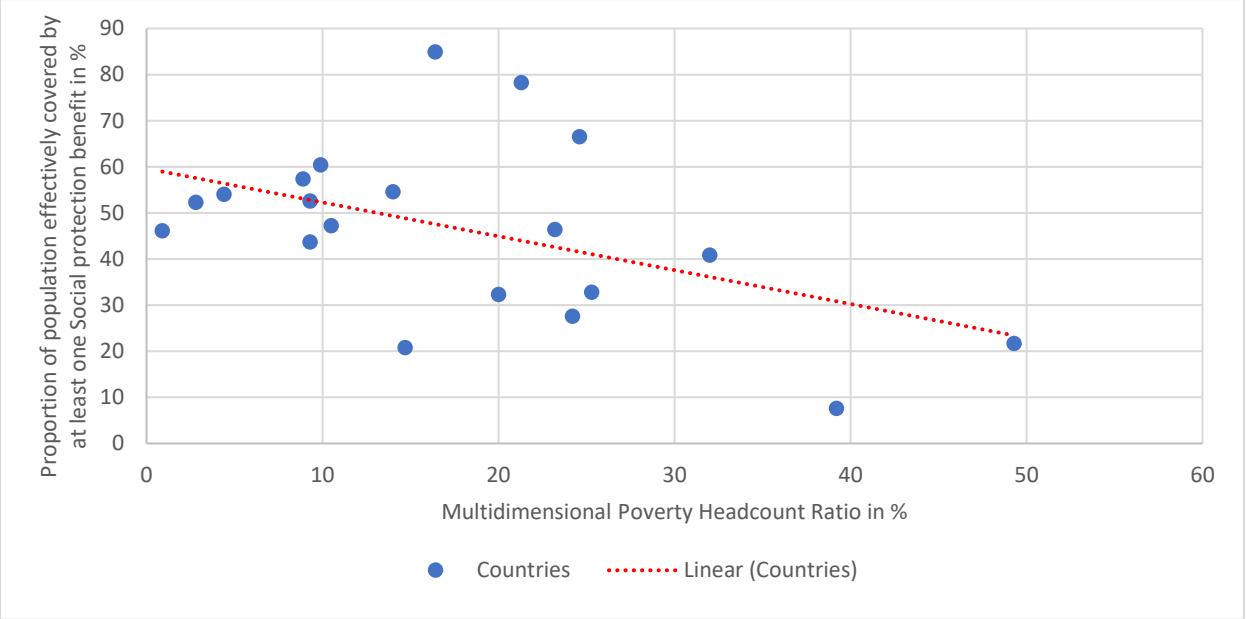
3 Social protection in Africa

3.1 Continental Trend analysis

One key strategy in alleviating poverty, as underscored in SDG1.3, is the widespread implementation of social protection programs aimed at ensuring universal access. In high- or middle-income economies, where extreme poverty rates are comparatively low, there's a high degree of social protection coverage across the population. For instance, Europe and Central Asia have social protection coverage of 83% along with a headcount poverty rate of 11% (ILO 2020b).

However, the reality as of 2020 reveals that a significant 53.1% of the global population lacked effective protection through social protection measures. What is particularly striking is that out of this substantial number, 1.3 billion individuals reside in Africa, accounting for approximately 82.6% of the population who are without access to any form of social protection (ILO 2020b). Nonetheless, persistent concerns endure both in political and scientific circles, casting doubt on the effectiveness of social protection measures in alleviating poverty. Factors such as insufficient political commitment, limited administrative capacity for implementation, the social stigma attached to targeted programs, and the absence of access to essential rights exemplify why social protection schemes can contradict the expectations (Margitic and Ravallion 2019; Schüring and Loewe 2021).

Figure 5: Correlation Analysis of the effective Coverage of Social protection and Multidimensional Headcount Ratio in % in Africa



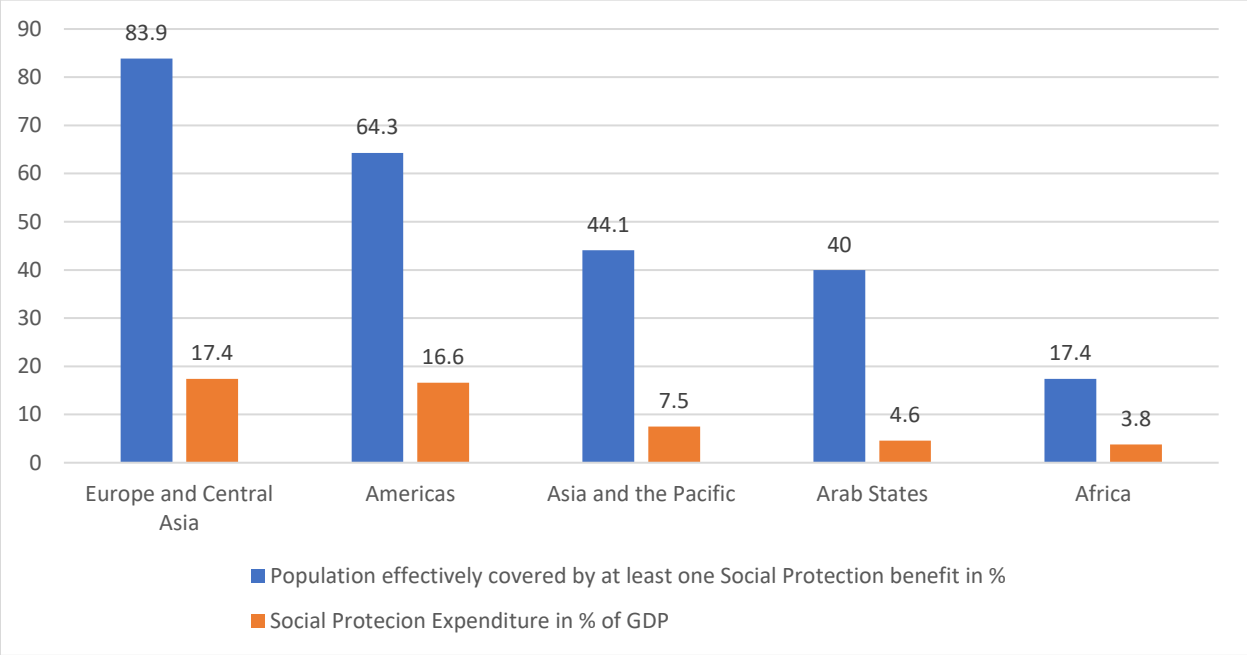
Source: World Bank, Global Monitoring Database, 2023 and ILO Database 2023. N=20; α=0.0054; r=-0.4736.

Poverty adversely affects the effective coverage of social protection. Robust social protection systems can be essential for mitigating the impact of poverty on individuals and communities as indicated by a negative correlation between social protection and poverty (s. figure 5).

A correlation analysis of the Multidimensional Poverty Headcount Ratio and the Effective Coverage of Social protection in Africa showed a significant correlation of -0.4736 (s. figure 5). Consequently, countries which have low social protection coverage tend to be linked with higher levels of multidimensional poverty and vice versa. The correlation is corroborated by empirical studies that shows social protection measures can contribute to not only poverty reduction but also broader development goals (Fiszbein, Kanbur, and Yemtsov 2013; Ginneken 2005).

From a global perspective, Africa has the most limited access to comprehensive, universal social protection. This situation is also reflected in Africa's position on the Social Progress Index, ranking 169 countries based on their social well-being. African countries consistently occupy the lowest positions and finds themselves at the bottom of the Social Progress Index, which ranks 169 countries based on their social well-being. While there has been a general improvement across Africa and globally over the past decade, 18 African countries are among the bottom 20 in the ranking, and no African nation has managed to secure a place in the top 40 positions (The Social Progress Imperative 2022).

Figure 6: Continental Comparison of Effective Social protection Coverage and Social protection Spending



Source: ILO Database 2023

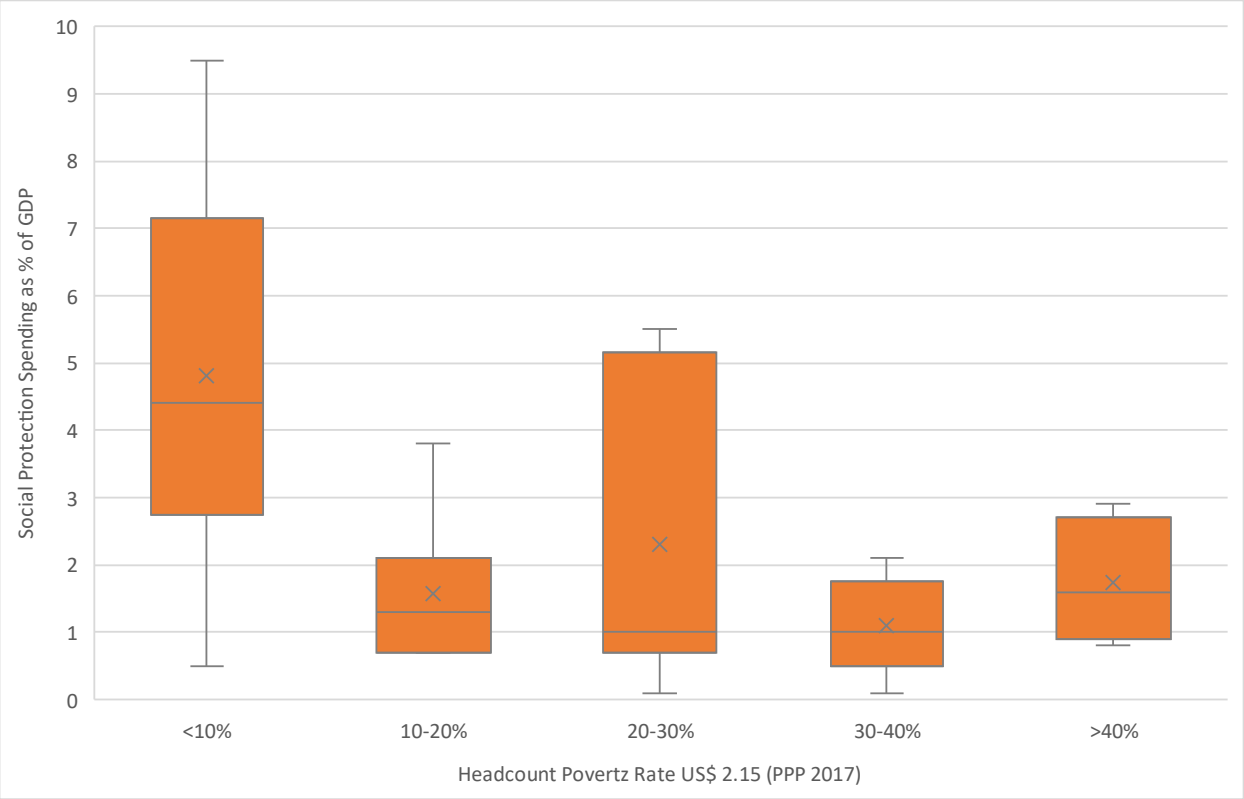
The most important pillar of social protection in Africa is social assistance with a share of 77%, followed by supply-side labour market programmes (15%) and social insurance (8%). The total spending for that year was US$19 billion, which is a per capita spending of about US$28. In comparison, North America's spending encompassed US$4,130 per capita at the same time (Gentilini et al. 2022).

Not only the spending per capita is one of the lowest from a global perspective. Additionally, Africa allocates the lowest overall social protection expenditure, excluding health, in contrast to other global regions, constituting just 3.8% of its GDP. In comparison, Europe and Central Asia allocate 17.4% of their GDP, the Americas 16.6%, and Asia and the Pacific 7.5% (ILO Social protection Database 2020). In the African context, the median social protection spending as a percentage of GDP exhibits considerable

variation, with upper-middle-income countries allocating the highest proportion at 4.1%, while low-income economies allocate the lowest at 0.9% (s. figure 6). This distinction implies that, on average, both in terms of GDP percentage and absolute expenditure, high-income countries like South Africa and Seychelles allocate more resources to social protection, whereas lower-income countries like Rwanda and Morocco allocate relatively less. It's noteworthy that Seychelles stands as the sole high-income country within the African continent, contributing 6.4% of its GDP to Social protection. Seychelles has a total population of 97,741 and a GDP per capita of US$17,126.5, marking a unique case in Africa. Additionally, Guinea-Bissau, despite being categorized as a low-income economy, significantly prioritizes social protection as a share of its GDP with 4.8% compared to other low-income economies.

Since 2010, approximately two-thirds of the Social protection measures were introduced by high- and middle-income countries, while low-income countries contributed less than 10% (Gentilini et al. 2022; ILO Social protection Database 2020). The Social Assistance Politics and Institutions project, for example, states that the number of social assistance programs in Africa rose from about 20 in 2000 to about 85 in 2015. At the same time, their reach of vulnerable individuals rose fivefold over this period (Seekings 2019). Over the past 20 years, there has been an increase in social protection programmes in Africa. However, if the global perspective is used, the progressive picture changes: 3856 public measures were planned or implemented worldwide from 2020 to 2021. 100 out of these benefit the African population, which accounts for approx. 2.6% of the measures (ILO 2022).

Figure 7: Classification of social protection expenditure based on the headcount poverty rate of US$ 2.15 (PPP 2017)

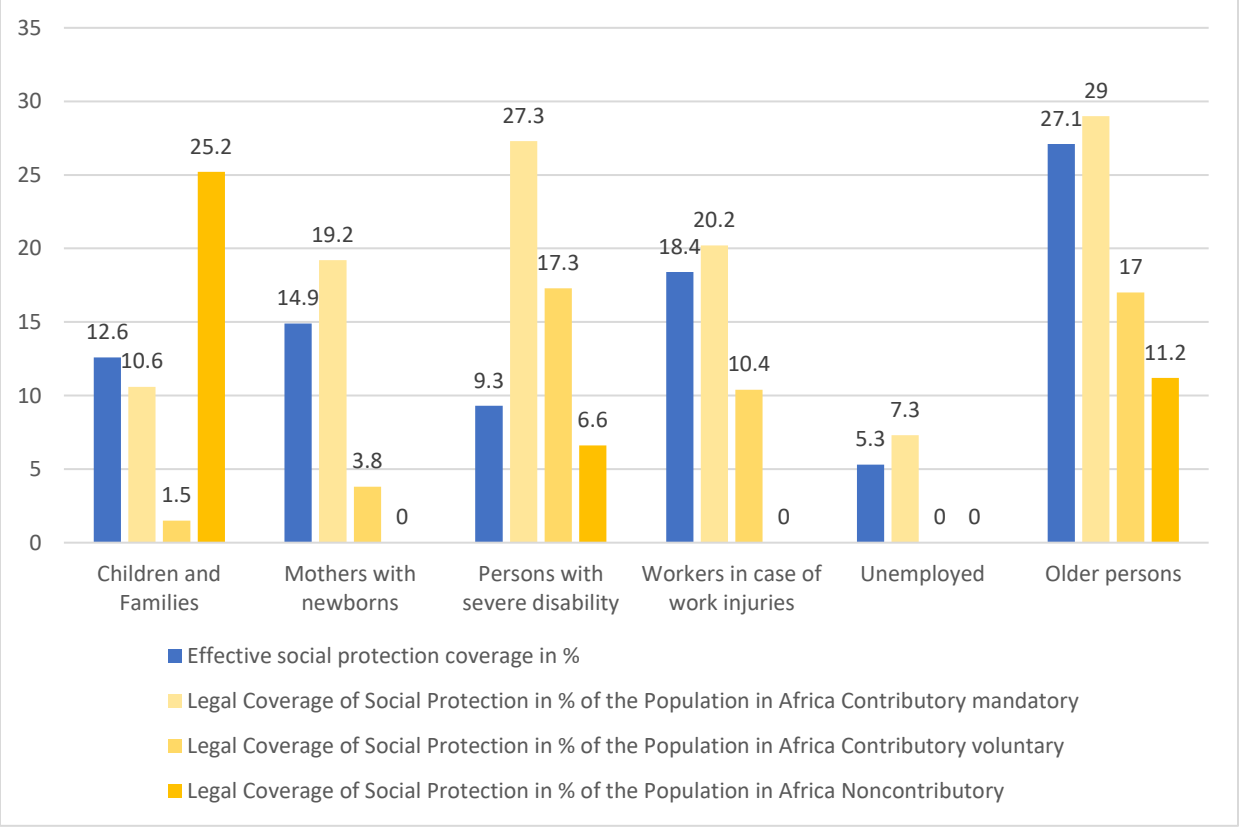


Source: ILO Database 2023

3.2 Social protection Instruments

The pivotal document guiding social protection in Africa is the Social Policy Framework for Africa (2009), introduced by the African Union. This framework is the foundation for most NSPF, NSPP, and NSPS adopted by 44 African countries, where Social protection is identified as a key thematic social issue (UNDP and AU 2019; ILO 2020b). Proposed strategies for achieving comprehensive social protection encompass the expansion or subsidization of social insurance schemes, the establishment of employment guarantees, the reinforcement of community-based insurance schemes (grounded in African solidarity principles), and the implementation of social welfare programs, which include non-contributory cash transfers (Devereux 2017; Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021). Consequently, African countries conceptualize social protection more expansively than ILO's approach of Social Protection Floors. This broader perspective incorporates moral principles rooted in African culture and considers employment incentives. In addition, Seekings (2019) points out that the universal approach according to the ILO has not been introduced into the current policy reforms.

Figure 8: Comparison of Effective Coverage and Legal Coverage of Africa



Source: ILO Social protection Database 2023.

Governments would continue to reject universalism, believing that non-contributory transfers promote "dependency" that both undermines development and contradicts the norms of reciprocity and responsibility (Seekings 2019).

Despite the existing frameworks, legal protection for vulnerable and marginalized groups, especially within non-contributory schemes, remains still inadequate (s. figure 8). In general, Africa characterizes an overall low legal coverage with a considerable variability within regions. Nevertheless, the rates of legal protection of vulnerable groups are usually higher than the effective protection[3]. Sudan provides a noteworthy example, having revised its National Disability Act in 2017. However, despite these legal efforts, about 2.1 million or 5% of the population with disabilities still encounter barriers that make it difficult to access social protection. These challenges include equal access to basic services, access to economic opportunities, maintenance of adequate standards of living, and opportunities for participation in public life (Republic of the Sudan 2022). This highlights a crucial point: a legal framework alone does not guarantee effective outreach to vulnerable groups (see Chapter 4.4 Distribution Chain). However, these challenges are not unique to people with disabilities, but affect vulnerable and marginalized groups to varying degrees. For this reason, the social protection System includes various instruments to improve the quality of life.

The first and most widely used pillar of the Social protection Floor is social transfers, which are characterized by a regular and non-contributory character (ILO 2022; 2021c). The access consists regardless of a person's employment and contribution history, which are granted as a binding and reliable transfer by the state. Social transfers are divided into three types: universal programmes, which are accessible to all citizens, social assistance, which is mainly provided to vulnerable people, and allowances, which are paid out to victims of wars, among others (Schüring and Loewe 2021). Social transfers do not simply encompass Cash Transfers as popular instrument but also implement other forms of monetary pressure relief. Tunisia, for example, reduced the transport fare for Tunisian citizens. Additionally, from the start of the 2020 school year, children from poor families and limited incomes, who are continuing their studies, benefit from free transportation (Republique Tunisienne 2021). As illustrated in Figure 8, three out of six specific target groups are encompassed by legal provisions within non-contributory Social

[3] This indicator encompasses the proportion of the total population receiving at least one contributory or non-contributory cash benefit, or actively contributing to at least one social security scheme. Social Services or employment schemes are not included in this indicator of the ILO Social protection Database.

protection schemes, yet their coverage remains notably low: Children and Families (25.5%), old-age persons (11.2%) and Persons with disabilities (6.6%) (ILO 2020b). Consequently, individuals such as mothers with newborns, workers facing work-related injuries, and the unemployed find themselves inadequately covered under the initial pillar of social transfers. This becomes even more significant when considering the effectiveness of these non-contributory measures. According to the ILO Database for Social protection, non-contributory social protection measures exhibit a higher effective coverage rate compared to solely contributory measures. Notably, countries[4] with 100% legal coverage of non-contributory pension schemes for old-age persons demonstrate an almost 100% effective coverage rate. Kenya stands as an exception, where only 13.2% of the target group of old-age persons is effectively covered despite having 100% legal coverage.

Box 2: Kenya's old-age Persons Program

In 2020, Kenya has a population over 65 years of age of approximately 1.3 million, mostly reliant on contributory Social protection schemes (ILO Database 2020). More than 90% (2018) of the population works in the informal sector not including them in the social protection measure for old-age persons (ILO 2021b).

Whilst there has been limited progress in reforming the contributory schemes, progress has been made in implementing the old-age citizens "Inua Jamii 70 years and above" program. It was introduced in January 2018, representing Kenya's first universal social protection program, guaranteeing a minimum pension to all older persons aged above 70 years. The scheme is funded by the government and has been rolled out to around 533,000 senior citizens, expanding the Older Persons Cash Transfer program, which was targeted to poor and vulnerable households. If "Inua Jamii 70 years and above" attains full coverage, around 840,000 persons will be able to access the scheme and about 68,000 people aged 65–69 years will continue the Older Persons Cash Transfer program (Republic of Kenya 2020; Gentilini et al. 2022).

The effectiveness of legal provisions varies when considering the coverage of children. Although the non-contributory legal coverage of children in Africa exceeds 25%, only 12.6% of children benefit from social transfers. Libya, Namibia, and South Africa have a 100% legal coverage of non-contributory social protection measures. However, there is no available data for Libya, Namibia reports 22.8% effective protection for children, and South Africa has the highest effectiveness in the outreach of their social protection measures with 76.6% in Africa (ILO Database 2020).

[4] Botswana, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles (ILO Data Base for Social protection 2020).

These numbers support the discourse in the scientific literature on social protection, where scholars like Barrientos (2013) argue that the right to social assistance is not solely dependent on the instrument itself but rather on how social assistance is designed, institutionalized, and contextualized. A society might guarantee, through legal frameworks, practical implementations, and societal norms, that every citizen facing a situation of need will receive support. However, this access can be denied by administrative errors (Barrientos 2013; Schüring and Loewe 2021).

Social Insurance is the second pillar of social protection Systems, with the voluntary nature of private insurance increasingly being replaced by statutory mandates. For instance, the Sudanese Constitutional Document ensures equal rights for men and women in employment and other professional benefits, by providing maternity and childcare support (Republic of the Sudan 2022). Consequently, this mandatory regulation only applies to people who are in a formal employment relationship, where income earners are obliged to participate in insurance and pension schemes (Schüring and Loewe 2021). Therefore, the legal Social protection Coverage of mandatory contributions is in every Social protection function lower than compared to the legal coverage of voluntary contributions to Social protection (Kwakwa et al. 2022). In

Box 3: Micro-insurances as a risk-pooling tool for the informal sector

Micro-insurance is designed to provide social protection to particularly vulnerable populations in remote areas with informal working conditions. Distinguishing itself from social insurance schemes, micro-insurance operates on an optional membership basis, offering flexibility, with contributions and benefits tied to external factors such as harvest cycles. The definition of micro-insurance aligns closely with that of private insurance, but with a specific focus on individuals with limited income. Providers range from NGOs and commercial insurance companies to self-help groups. Less professionalized entities often achieve cost-effectiveness through lower-wage employees, on-site presence, and a nuanced understanding of members' specific needs. This form of social protection is predominantly utilized in West and Central Africa (Schüring and Loewe 2021; Carter and Janzen 2019).

A body of evidence from numerous studies indicates the effectiveness of existing micro-insurance schemes in reducing vulnerability to risks. Notably, index-based livestock insurance (IBLI) in northern Kenya demonstrated its effectiveness during the 2011 drought by providing immediate and substantial benefits to insured households. On average, households receiving payouts were less likely to sell livestock, thereby enhancing their chances of recovery. These households also anticipated maintaining their current food consumption, unlike their uninsured counterparts who experienced reductions in meals (Carter and Janzen 2019).

Some studies even suggest that micro-insurance enhances the willingness of insured households to invest in remunerative yet risky activities, thereby increasing the likelihood of households escaping poverty (Apostolakis et al. 2015; De Bock and Ontiveros 2013). In general, micro-insurance schemes contribute significantly to the reduction of (multidimensional) poverty (Schüring and Loewe 2021).

view of the high level of informal working conditions in Africa, it is discussed whether this form of social protection is suitable for a predominantly informal sector (Schüring and Loewe 2021; Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021).

To close this gap, almost all African countries rely on labour market policies (LMPs). Even though LMPs are not specifically mentioned as a pillar of the social protection Floors, they are most often mentioned as part of social protection in Africa. LMPs describe the many ways in which the state influences the functioning of the labour market. They comprise the rules through which the state protects workers by rebalancing the disproportionate power of employers deriving from market forces. Business Development Support (BDS), entrepreneurship training and micro-enterprise creation comprise a set of interventions in developing contexts, as they are conducive to employment creation both in formal and informal labour markets. In developing contexts, BDS programmes generally focus on creating a sustained income and reducing poverty of participants and their families, and therefore paying their part to achieving SDG1 (ILO 2022; Schüring and Loewe 2021; Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021). Namibia, for instance, recognizes the pivotal role of employment in the realm of social protection and has initiated an economic stimulus and relief package. This package incorporates wage subsidies and employee salary protection programs (Republic of Namibia 2021).

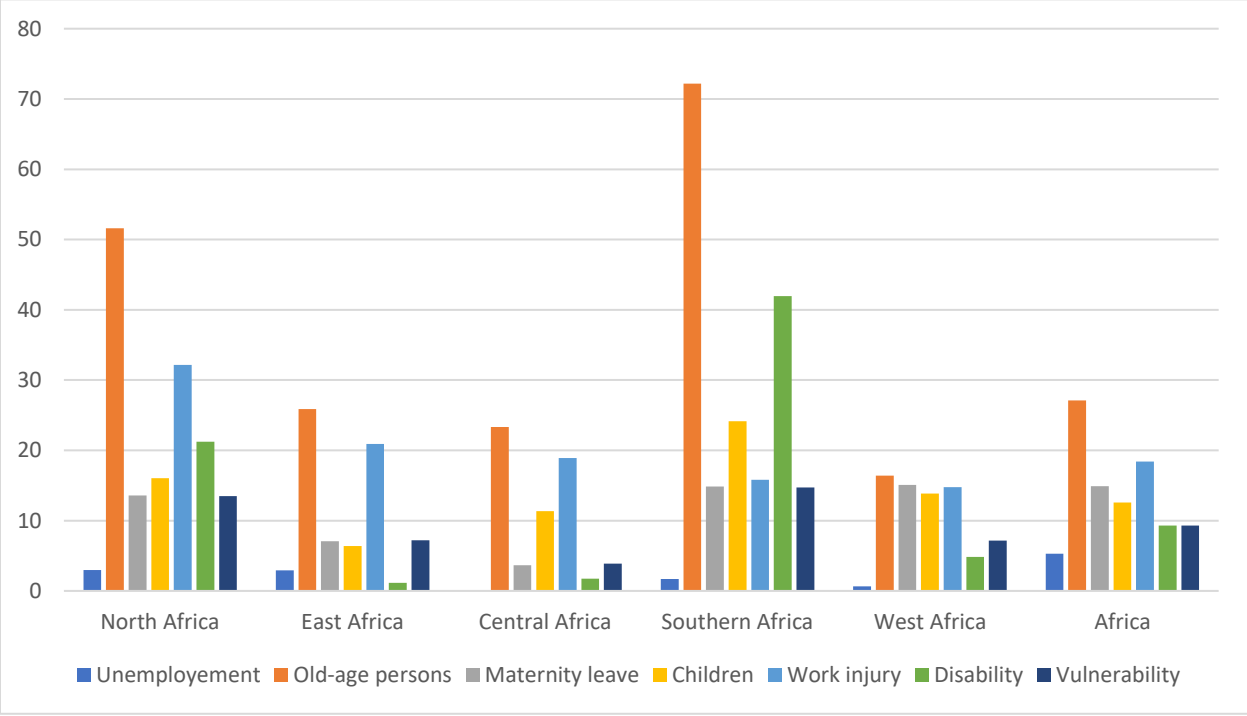
While material and monetary support has a positive impact on the reduction of social risks and aspects of exclusion, some situations require concrete, personal and guiding support on an individual basis. This type of service is commonly referred to as social services, which encompass a wide range of activities, including therapy and counselling, treatment, care and nursing services, community work as well as activation, employment and qualification services. This also includes the provision of information on services and benefits, for example, information on access modalities to potentially eligible beneficiaries (Schüring and Loewe 2021). For instance, the Tunisian Union of Social Solidarity collaborates with the Tunisian government in the anti-poverty endeavour, focusing on establishing income sources for economically vulnerable families. The intervention aims to support and enhance the self-development of communities and families at risk of exclusion and marginalization, emphasizing the promotion of entrepreneurship, preservation of essential services, and reinforcement of community life and solidarity principles (Nasri, Amara, and Helmi 2022; Republique Tunisienne 2021). In most low-income countries, however, the rising demand for social services is addressed to a large extent by the non-government sector. While some NGOs

are sub-contracted by the government, most NGOs work in parallel to the public sector (Schüring and Loewe 2021).

3.3 Target Groups

While SDG1.3 underscores the importance of a universal approach to social protection measures, it is paramount to recognize that specific vulnerable groups demand targeted support. Tailoring the strategies to address the diverse needs of these groups is essential for mitigating inequality. An equally critical consideration is understanding the needs of the target audience to ensure effective protection. Figure 9 visually illustrates the disparities in effective protection among various target groups, both across different regions and within them. Notably, the Southern African Region excels in nearly all aspects of social protection, surpassing the African average, while East, Central, and West Africa fall significantly below this average.

Figure 9: Effective Social protection Coverage in % by regions and target groups



Source: ILO Database 2023

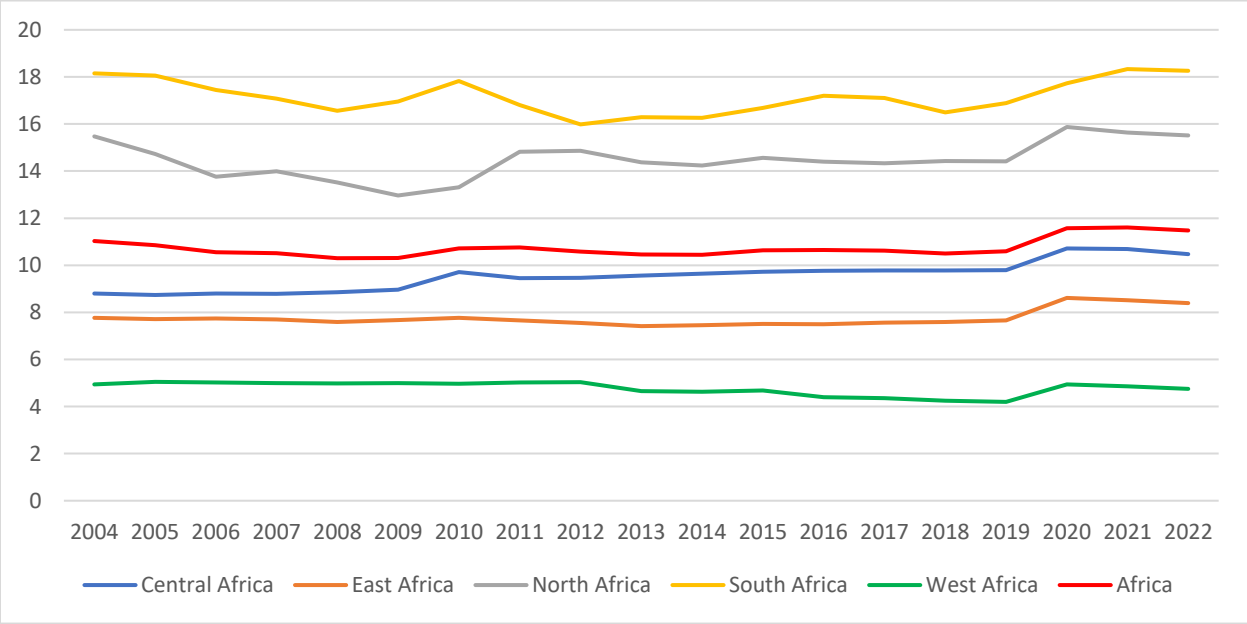
Among all the target groups, children emerge as a primary target for social protection initiatives in most African countries. This is particularly relevant given that children constitute the largest segment of the population, accounting for 40.56% (ILO 2020b) and displaying a continuous growth trajectory (World Bank

2022). While 87% of children in Europe and Central Asia and 66% in the Americas are in receipt of benefits, this is the case for only 12.6% per cent in Africa. This low number is also reflected in the allocation of funds. African nations allocate, on average, a mere 0.4% of their GDP to child-focused social protection endeavours, which falls significantly short of the global average. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize a notable shift in investment patterns during the Covid-19 pandemic (ILO 2022).

Numerous countries, including Algeria, have recognized that children, in particular, experience multidimensional poverty. This form of poverty encompasses factors such as access to education, clean water, electricity, sanitation, and not just monetary aspects (Bladehane 2019). It is worth noting that children's poverty is linked to the employment status of their parents, making it a focal point in many countries' policy considerations. However, more than 10% of the total labour force is still unemployed, which has increased with the beginning of the Corona pandemic (World Bank 2022).

When addressing unemployment, only ten out of the 54 countries have established a comprehensive policy framework, with limited provisions in some cases. This limitation in access is prominently evident in the low coverage of unemployed individuals, where a mere 5.3% of the population benefit from unemployment measures (ILO 2020b).

Figure 10: Unemployment rate in % of the total labour force



Source: ILO Database 2023

A significant contributing factor to this deficiency is the high prevalence of informal employment, encompassing a substantial 85.8% of the workforce. This figure is on the rise, aligning with data from the

ILO, which indicates that the majority of newly created jobs are situated within the informal sector (ILO 2022; 2020b). Individuals engaged in informal employment are excluded from both contributory social insurance and non-contributory social protection schemes, making them especially vulnerable to poverty during periods of economic shocks. Adding to this challenge, there is a notable lack of employment promotion through linkages with active labour market policies and job centres across many African countries. Such facilities often being either limited or non-existent. While nine countries[5] have implemented unemployment benefits, they are encumbered by stringent eligibility requirements and limitations (Nasri, Amara, and Helmi 2022). Consequently, 11.6% of the male population in Africa benefit from legal coverage under these unemployment policies, in stark contrast to 7.4% of the female population. This disparity underscores a gender-specific challenge in accessing unemployment benefits across the continent (ILO 2020b). In North Africa, women face an unemployment rate of 22.6%, which is almost 10% higher than that of men. Additionally, in Tunisia and Sudan, women and girls suffer from job insecurity and precarious working conditions. Usually married at an early age due to family's needs to ensure social and economic security, women are traditionally valued by their ability to procreate. Marriage is the means for women and girls to demonstrate their value in society, gaining privilege, respect and recognition as a mother (Republique Tunisienne 2021; The Federel Republic of Somalia 2022).

Adding to the challenges, the prevalent financing mechanism for maternity benefits in Africa is still employer liability, often leading to discriminatory practices. The landscape varies across the continent, with 18 countries offering social insurance maternity benefits, 18 providing only employer liability provisions, and 11 combining both approaches. The range of maternity leave across the continent ranges from 8 weeks to 4 months (UN 2023b). Furthermore, prenatal benefits are available in only 11 out of the 54 African nations, exclusively through insurance schemes (ILO 2020b). Given the prevalence of informal employment arrangements among women, employer-centred security systems fail to provide comprehensive protection for pregnant women. Therefore, the access to maternity and prenatal benefits remains severely limited, reaching only 14.9% of women going through this significant life event (ILO 2020b). This lack of coverage not only poses considerable risks to maternal and perinatal health, increasing morbidity and mortality rates, but also has adverse consequences for child development. Even in cases of formal employment, maternity benefits are frequently shorter in duration and offer lower benefit amounts in the private sector compared to the public sector (ILO 2023).

[5] Algeria, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Gabon, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Tunisia.

Furthermore, an ongoing debate in African countries (for example Mozambique, Nigeria, and Rwanda (World Bank 2021; Alabi 2022; Chamber of Deputies 2023) revolves around the introduction and the design of paternity benefits. 8 countries[6] already provide a paternity benefit. This discussion highlights the evolving nature of social policies in the region, as the recognition of the role of fathers in child-rearing and family support becomes an important aspect of fostering greater gender equity and family well-being. These benefits typically range from one to ten days of leave, with variations between fully paid options and the possibility of claiming benefits from a dedicated fund (ILO 2020b).

Among the various segments of the population in Africa, older persons stand out with the highest effective coverage of social protection benefits, encompassing 27.1% (s. figure 9). This notable figure can be attributed to the relatively low percentage of elderly individuals in the population, accounting for only 3.48%, and the funding of 2.2% of the GDP allocated to their support, which surpasses the allocation for children (ILO 2020b). In line with the fiscal constraints, merely 8.5% of the working-age population actively contributes to pension schemes (ILO 2020b). Recognizing the need for sustainability, some countries have embarked on pension system reforms through parametric adjustments. These reforms involve measures such as raising contribution rates, transitioning from an end-of-career to a career-average pension formula, and even raising the retirement age, as observed in countries like Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia (Ministry of Planning and Economic Development Egypt 2021; Royaume du Maroc 2020; Republique de Mauritanie 2019; Republique Tunisienne 2021). Additionally, some countries have taken steps to extend mechanisms of old-age pensions to workers in the informal economy and those who lack coverage. They have achieved this through the extension of social insurances or the implementation of universal or means-tested non-contributory basic old-age pensions. For instance, Cabo Verde has been providing a tax-financed old-age social pension for over 15 years, and similar schemes are in place in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, and Zanzibar (ILO 2022; 2020b; Ministry of Finance and United Nations Botswana 2022; Kingdom of Lesotho 2022; Republic of Namibia 2021; The United Republic of Tanzania 2023).

[6] Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda, Tunisia, Sao Tome.

Box 4: East Africa's Social Protection Schemes for old-age persons

Looking ahead, the effective protection of older generations will confront significant challenges. By 2065, the current generation under 25, which continues to grow and is expected to do so despite decreasing fertility rates, will have reached retirement age. The proportion of the population aged over 60 initially experiences slow growth before rising between 2030 and 2040, particularly in the cases of Ethiopia and Kenya. Here, the relative size of the elderly population is projected to double between 2030 and 2065 (World Bank 2022). Therefore, expanding contributory social protection systems becomes imperative to ensure adequate retirement income in the future. Therefore, the OECD suggests "that workers set money aside for the majority of their career" (OECD 2017). Recent data from 2015 to 2022 reveals that 46.7% of youth aged 15-24 are actively participating in the labor force in East Africa, leaving over 50% behind. Notably, even after 2014, the figures remain relatively stable for the countries that have provided such data (World Bank 2022a). However, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a noticeable decline in the labor force participation rate in Rwanda and Malawi (OECD 2017).

Additionally, Burundi and Comoros acknowledge that older individuals, particularly those who were employed in the public sector, tend to benefit more from pension schemes compared to other sectors. This reveals the presence of more privileged groups among the elderly, having easier access to social protection, which contradicts the goal of universal social protection floors (Presidence de l'Union des Comores 2020; Ministiere des Finances, du Budget et de la Cooperation au Developpement economique 2020).

People with disabilities represent a group in Africa that remains largely under-protected with 9.3% of individuals with severe disabilities benefiting from at least one social protection benefit. However, it is essential to note that there is significant variation across different regions of the continent. Southern Africa stands out with a coverage level of 61.8%, well above the global average of 33.5%. In contrast, Central and Eastern Africa have limited coverage of less than 2% (ILO 2020b). To achieve equitable living conditions, people with disabilities often incur additional costs. These expenses encompass disability-specific needs, such as assistive devices and personal assistance, as well as heightened spending on essential services like transportation and medical care (Mont et al. 2022). According to Mont et al. (2022), households in Ethiopia with a member with a disability require 6% more income to maintain their living standards compared to a household without a disabled member. In Tanzania, this figure stands at 10%. These estimates are lower than what is often observed in higher income countries, where the additional expenditures average is around 43% (Mont et al. 2022). Various factors lead to a discrepancy between the expenses and the needs that are not met. This is especially the case in low-income countries. It is crucial to consider the severity

of each individual's disability (ILO 2022; 2021a). For instance, one person may require a personal assistant, while another may only need a walker. Therefore, a range of programs must be in place to address the diverse in-kind needs and costs. A simple look at the average costs can lead to the assumption that implementing a cash transfer program can meet everyone's needs (Mont et al. 2022). However, a notable disparity between legal provisions and effective coverage exists, partly attributed to a lack of comprehensive data.

Box 5: Displaced Persons as new Target Group

As climate change exacerbates living conditions and armed conflicts continue to escalate, such as those in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia, the number of (internally) displaced persons is anticipated to increase (World Bank 2023). Remarkably, within East Africa, Somalia stands as the sole country that has formally recognized migrants as a vulnerable demographic and subsequently considered them into the scope of social protection schemes (The Federel Republic of Somalia 2022).
Migrants in Africa, akin to other priority groups as identified by the ILO, represent one of the most vulnerable group within societies, often grappling with the challenges of poverty. Nonetheless, their access to social protection benefits remains significantly restricted, primarily due to a combination of legal constraints, such as requirements related to the duration of employment, residency status, nationality, and migrant classification, along with practical hurdles including insufficient awareness, limited contribution capacity, and the intricacies of administrative procedures, as elucidated by Adepoju (2020).
In the case of Sudan, 6% of the population are internally displaced persons. But this is only the number of people who were registered. An additional unknown number exists. They often do not have access to land for agriculture, adequate water and sanitation which has led to outbreaks of disease in the camps. Displaced children, who account for 50% of displaced persons are particularly vulnerable. Many do not attend school, and their learning environment is not appropriate (The Republic of the Sudan 2022).
SDG1.3 does not explicitly incorporate displaced individuals or refugees, however, there exists potential to encompass this specific group within the broader category of the vulnerable and poor according to ILO's target groups.

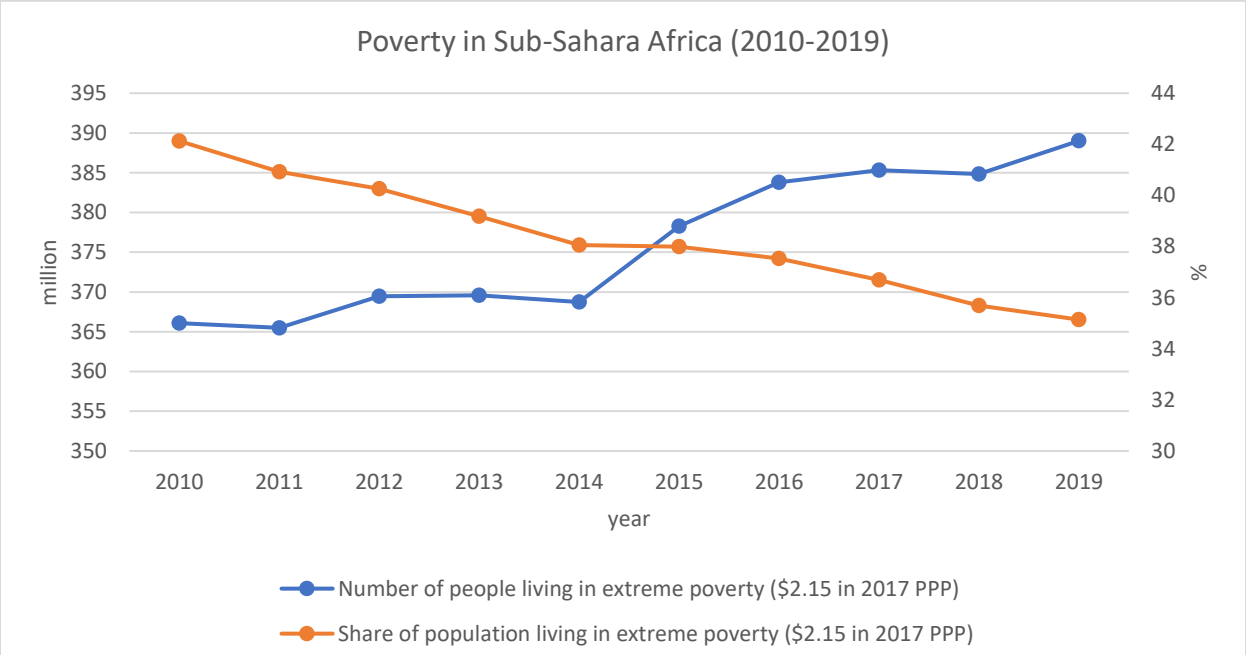
4 Emerging challenges

4.1 Poverty

With regard to SDG1, empirical research has established a robust consensus on the substantial impact of economic growth on poverty reduction (Cerra, Loayza, and Lama 2021). This has been observed in particular in emerging and low-income economies. When the average GDP per capita rises, it elevates the incomes of the poorest segments, leading to a reduction in poverty. Economic growth translates into improved education, healthcare, and employment opportunities for vulnerable people, which, in turn, grants them better access to essential public services and goods (Cerra, Loayza, and Lama 2021; World Bank 2022; Osabohien et al. 2020).

Turning to the specific case of Africa, a distinct trend emerges. Among the 54 countries examined, 46 exhibit a Gross National Income (GNI) below US$4,465 (World Bank 2023a), placing them in the World Bank's classification as low- or lower middle-income economies. Over the past two decades, there has been a noticeable shift, with the number of countries classified as low-income (with a GNI lower than US$1,135) decreasing from 37 to 22 (World Bank 2023a). While this data highlights a discernible increase in GNI among African countries, this shift primarily occurs within the lower income bracket. The number

Figure 11: Comparison of the number and the share of people living on less than US$2.15 (2017 PPP) per year in Sub-Sahara

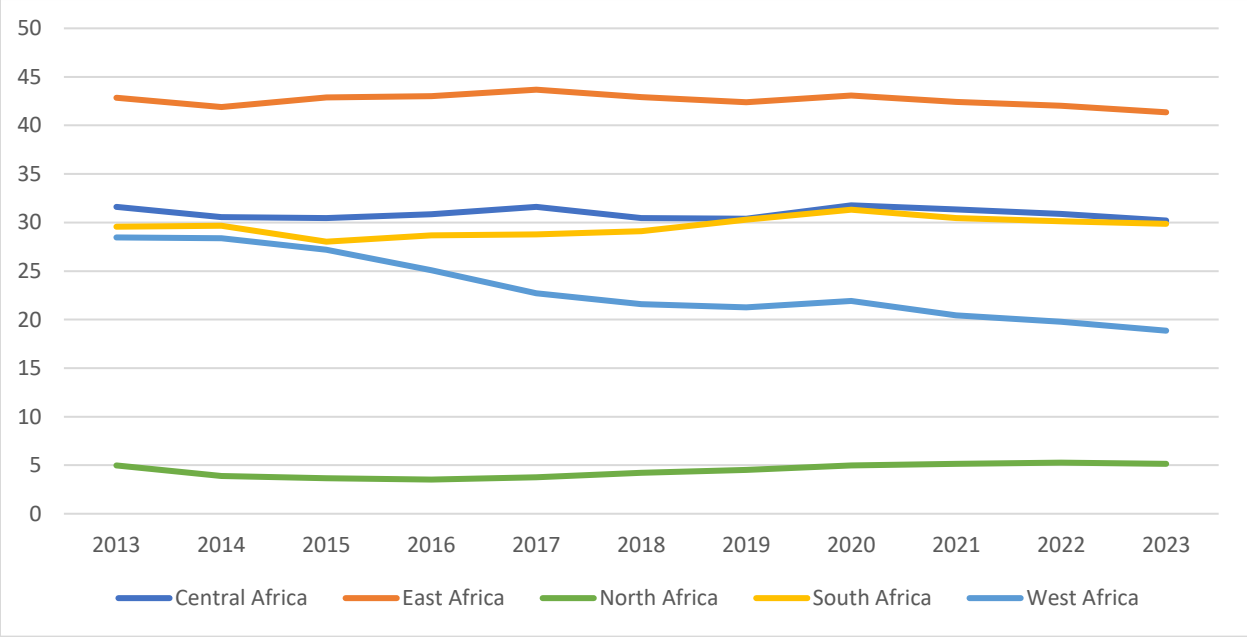


Source: World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform 2022

of high and upper-middle income economies has remained stable over the past 10 years (World Bank 2023a). However, despite a consistent rise in GNI across Africa, poverty reduction has not seen significant improvement. A closer examination reveals only marginal changes in the proportion of people living on less than US$2.15 per day (PPP 2017). Almost 48% of the population in Africa is still affected by extreme poverty (SDGCA and SDSN 2023). As reported by the World Bank (2023), poverty continues to be heavily concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the poverty rate is approximately four times higher than in the world's second-poorest region. While the overall poverty headcount rate is on a decline, significant heterogeneity exists in poverty reduction efforts across African countries. However, the high population growth in the region has led to an overall increase in the absolute number of people living in poverty, rising from 385 million to 389 million (World Bank 2022).

In 2023, East Africa[7] stands out as the region with the highest poverty rate in Africa, with 41.3% of its

Figure 12: Headcount Poverty Rate of US$2.15 per day (PPP 2017 in %) per region



Source: SDGCA 2020

population living in conditions of extreme poverty. However, it is important to note a striking disparity within the region, ranging from as low as 0% extreme poverty headcount ratio in Seychelles to as high as 79% in Burundi (ILO 2020b).

[7] Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda.

In contrast, North Africa[8] exhibits the lowest headcount poverty rate in Africa, standing at 5.16%. Simultaneously, the region has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.69, which surpasses the HDI of other regions in Africa. To present a more nuanced understanding of their socio-economic conditions and to enhance the overall well-being of their populations, many North African countries, such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, often refer to their national poverty lines and employ a multidimensional poverty approach. Morocco provides a notable example which shows an opposite trend of poverty over the years compared to Sub-Saharan Africa (s. figure 12). The number of people falling below the annual expenditure poverty line has decreased significantly, dropping from 2.755 million in 2007 to 1.021 million in 2018. In contrast to the Eastern African countries, not only the percentage of people living in poverty decreased, also the absolute numbers minimized. A similar downward trend is observed in terms of multidimensional poverty. From 2004 to 2014, the national multidimensional poverty rate has decreased from 25% to 8.2%. In urban areas, it declined from 9% to 2%, while in rural regions, the reduction was from 45% to 18%.

Box 6: Macro-economic shocks and its implications for SDG1.3

In the context of SDG1 and especially SDG1.3, African countries identified several key challenges in their VNRs, including the war in Ukraine, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the threat of climate change. These challenges had significant macro-level impacts, affecting national markets, and pushing impoverished communities further into poverty (World Bank 2023). Notably, the progress that countries have recorded in recent years did not materialize or, in many cases, deteriorated. Several key factors, such as general price spikes in critical commodities, internal conflicts, and diminished government financial capacity, have contributed to the stalling or retrenchment of Social protection schemes, as for example in countries like Uganda, Rwanda and Ethiopia (Republic of Uganda 2020; Ministry of Planning and Development 2022; Republic of Rwanda 2023). These challenges disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, with a specific emphasis placed on women and children in the evaluated VNRs.

In contrast, Sudan, classified as a low-income economy by the World Bank, stands out in the region with the highest headcount poverty rate, notably at 25.35% (ILO 2020b). Therefore, showing a different socio-economic landscape compared to other countries in Northern Africa. However, one similarity they have in common is that poverty is being most prevalent in rural areas. In the period from 2014 until 2015, 67.7% of the Sudanese population in rural areas was living below the poverty line, compared to 48.8% in urban centres. However, an urbanization of poverty is evident in Sudan, with a substantial increase in poverty

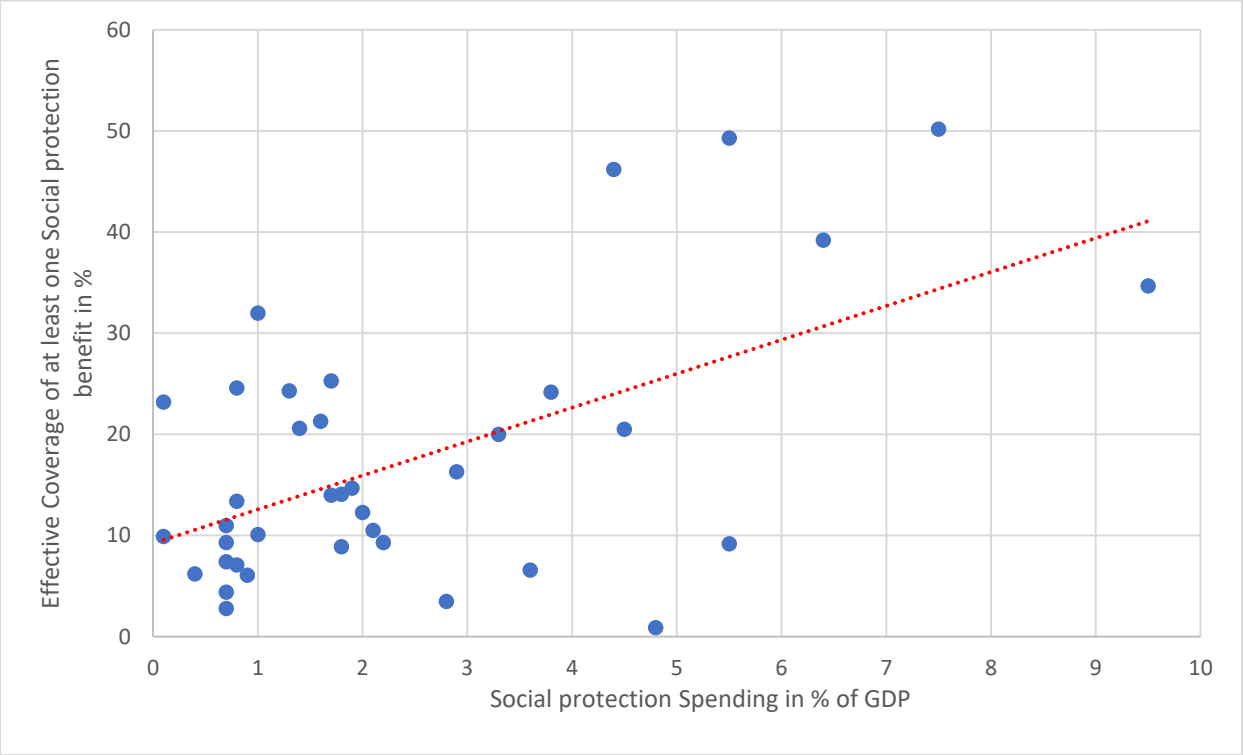
[8] Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia.

rates recorded in urban areas. Between 2009 and 2015, poverty rates in urban regions rose by 23.5 percentage points, far surpassing the 8 percentage point increase observed in rural areas (Republic of the Sudan 2022). This development of poverty throughout the country is contrary to the prevailing trends in Africa, which need to entail new and adapted measures to combat poverty. In conclusion, it becomes clear that SDG1 will be missed by 2030. This is due, among other things, to increasing uncertainties and shocks, which are increasing worldwide.

4.2 Financing

The presence of gaps in the coverage, comprehensiveness, and adequacy of social protection systems is closely associated with underinvestment (ILO 2022; Schüring and Loewe 2021; Clement 2020). The data of a correlation analysis between the percentage of the population covered by at least one social protection benefit and the social protection expenditure rate as a percentage of GDP also confirm a significant correlation of 0.5707 in Africa (s. figure 13). The higher the spending on social protection, the higher the coverage and vice versa.

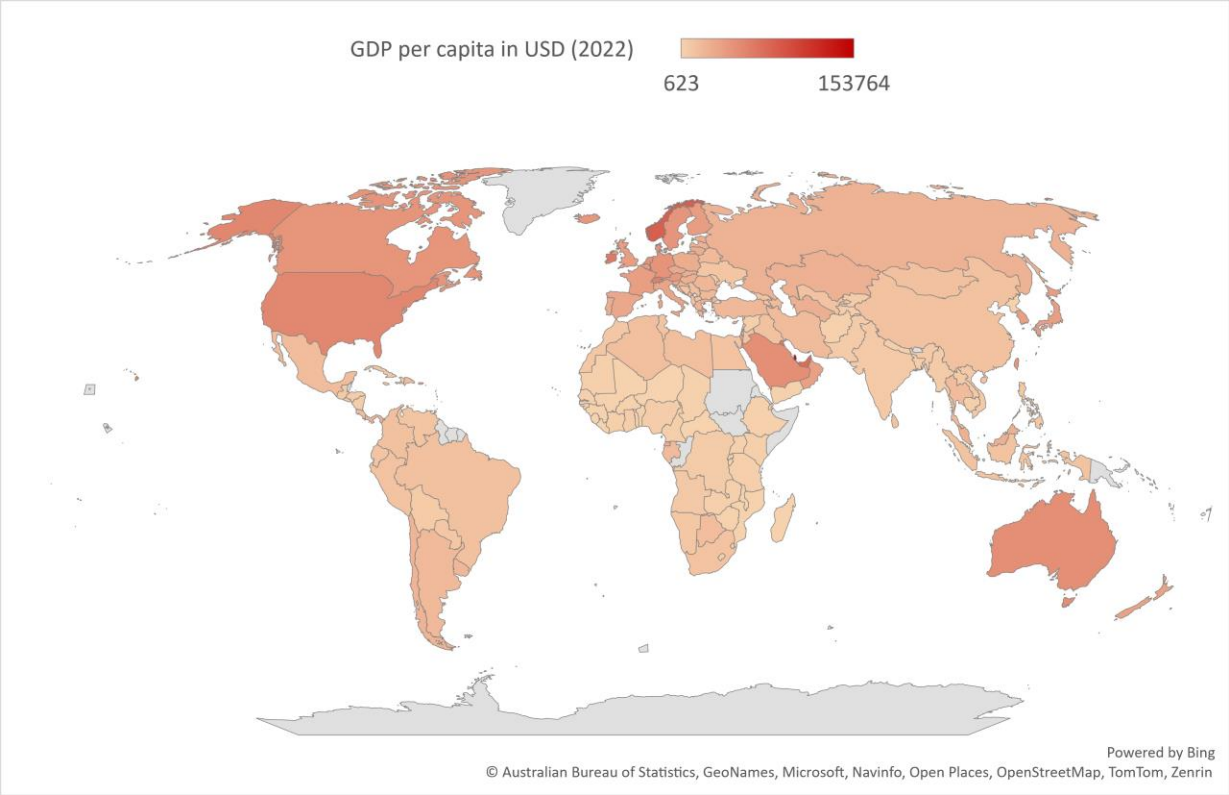
Figure 13: Correlation Analysis of Effective Coverage of at least one social protection Benefit and Social protection Expenditure



Source: Based on numbers of the social protection Database by the ILO. *N=38; α=0.0002; r=0.5707.*

In 2020, an average of 3.8% of the continent's GDP was allocated to social protection measures, excluding health. This figure, compared to the global average of 12.9%, is remarkably lower, especially considering a low GDP per capita (s. figure 14) and an annually growing population by 2.11% in 2022. Due to a combination of high fertility rates and significant increases in life expectancies across the east African countries, rapid population growth is projected to continue until 2065, which further exacerbates the question of the financing of social protection (OECD 2017; Clement 2020; ILO 2022).

Figure 14: Global Map of the GDP per Capita in US$ (2020)


GDP per capita in USD (2022)
623
153764
Powered by Bing
© Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, Navinfo, Open Places, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, Zenrin

Source: Maddison Project Database 2020

Furthermore, the pervasive informality in the labour market severely constrains the fiscal capacity available for tax-funded social protection initiatives. In countries characterized by extensive informality, the contributions to the social protection system are notably diminished, consequently limiting the resources available for expanding and enhancing social protection measures (ILO 2020a). Non-tax financing social protection instruments of the government are for instance revenues from public

enterprises and form the exploitation of natural resources through sovereign wealth funds. With sustainable use, these funds can be used as a source of annual funding for social protection systems (Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021).

As a response to emerging challenges and to guarantee a sustainable social protection scheme, African countries shift its aim from a tax-based system to a mixed financing model to provide the Social Protection Floors for the most vulnerable individuals in a society. In Mauritius, for instance, the National CSR Foundation provides the financial support to approximately 200 NGOs, so that they can operationalize social protection projects. As from January 2019, companies in Mauritius are contributing at least 75% of their CSR money to the Foundation (Republic of Mauritius 2019).

Ghana's National Social protection Policy (NSPP) defines social protection measures as a comprehensive "package of policies and programs, implemented as part of public action" (NSPP Ghana). However, the private sector is significant in the light of sustainable financing of the social protection system. To cover the finances to achieve the goal of a universal social protection Floor, several African countries have sought to involve the private sector in these initiatives. As recognized in Ethiopia's National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS), agencies, development partners, civil society, and, to some extent, private sector organizations need to be involved. Taking the Sudan Emergency Safety Nets Project as an illustration, the World Bank allocated a grant exceeding US$100 million to the World Food Programme (WFP) for the implementation of Unconditional Cash Transfers and Unconditional Food Transfers in Sudan. This initiative, active from July 2022 to September 2023, brought relief to approximately 2 million individuals (Kwakwa et al. 2022).

However, Clement (2020) argues that countries which have strong government expenditures, a strong civil society and little reliance on international institutions have the highest welfare outcomes in Africa.

4.3 Covid-19 Pandemic

Before the pandemic, limited progress was observed in extending coverage in the areas of sickness, employment injury, and disability benefits. These benefit schemes primarily relied on employer liability in 29 countries or contributions through social insurance in 30 countries. However, over 80% of the labour force, primarily in informal jobs, did not have access to these schemes (Abay et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the pressure on social protection schemes became evident. In low- and middle-income countries, over 40% of households reported substantial income losses through mid-2021, with

particularly pronounced impacts on vulnerable groups, such as youth and low-skilled workers (World Bank 2022). This crisis led to a 7.7% decline in hours worked in Africa in 2020, equivalent to the loss of 29 million full-time jobs (ILO 2021b). This wave of unemployment exposed the lack of social protection for many employees, especially concerning unemployment benefits or income support (ILO 2022). In low-income countries, more households relied on savings and assets to cope with the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis than on government support (Schüring and Loewe 2021).

A significant number of programs were implemented – a total of 238 measures across the continent as of May 2021 to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO 2022) – with most social protection responses in the region building upon existing systems and relying heavily on external financing (Gentilini et al., 2020). Many programs provided support to households through transfers and subsidies, with a focus on utility subsidies and in-kind transfers, especially in lower-income countries. Cash transfers were implemented in nearly all countries. Even though cash transfers shine from their cost-effective side in many studies, the cost of providing cash transfers must also be considered. An analysis of Kondylis and Loeser (2021), who primarily reviewed cash transfer programs in Sub-Saharan Africa, indicates a cost of US$0.18 for each US$1 transferred. Positive fiscal externalities, such as value-added tax and additional earnings, can offset some of these costs, as acknowledged by the study of Lastunen et al. (2021). They analysed various African countries and found out that the impact of transfers on non-beneficiaries' ranges from US$0 to US$0.18 for each US$1 distributed. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, savings and informal transfers played a more significant role than government transfers in providing support (Nikoloski, Christiaensen, and Hill 2018 in World Bank 2022). Yet several developing economies achieved notable successes during COVID-19. South Africa initiated its biggest expansion of the social safety net in a generation, spending US$6 billion on poverty relief that benefited nearly 29 million people (Abay et al. 2023; Schüring and Loewe 2021). Compared to other regions, Sub-Saharan Africa had the longest lag time between the stay-home orders and first payments at 132 days, about twice the global average ((World Bank 2022).

During the COVID-19 crisis, the financing gap for establishing social protection floors widened by about 30% due to the increased need for healthcare services, income security measures, and GDP reductions. To ensure a basic level of social security through a nationally defined protection floor, lower-middle-income countries would need to invest an additional US$362.9 billion annually, equivalent to 5.1% of GDP, respectively. Low-income countries would need to invest an additional US$77.9 billion, equivalent to

15.9% of their GDP (ILO 2022). However, the majority of countries in Africa cannot cope with this financial capacity and can therefore not achieve SDG1.3.

Box 7: Conditional Cash Transfer Program in Tunisia

In order to mitigate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic in Tunisia, a project "Investing in children's human capital through a sustainable and inclusive social protection system" was developed in 2020, supported by UNICEF and financed by KFW. The financial volume of this project was US$13 million and was intended to supplement Tunisia's existing social protection system by introducing a cash benefit of TND 30 per child per month. It is aimed at specific groups of children (children aged 0 to 5 years and children aged 6 to 18 years) who live in low-income families and are at risk of poverty due to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.

The program has not been efficient in that they are in arrears with the payment of allowances. These delays are the result of the process of updating the database and register, as well as the cycle for the payment of the allowance, which does not follow the procedure already implemented. The sustainability of the program depends on the financial capacity of the DSS to ensure the continuity of the program beyond KfW funding. As a first step, a loan agreement was signed with the World Bank to take over the program, which shows that the sustainability of the program is secured on a financial level until the end of 2023 (Plan Eval SPRL and Vision Development 2022).

4.4 Distribution Chain

Irrespective of the type of social transfer programme and its specific approach to targeting, there are some core functions that need to be performed in order to provide benefits and services in a way that is timely, efficient, effective, inclusive and sustainable. Barca and Hebba (in Schüring and Loewe 2021) claim that the distributional process of social protection in low- and middle-income countries does not follow the delivery chain (s. figure 15). The challenges of this Process are also recognized by Angola, Eswatini, Malawi, South Africa, Tunisia and other countries. For instance, only 27 per cent and 10 per cent of social transfer recipients in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia had access to a social worker in 2015, respectively (Barca and Hebbar 2020).

Figure 15: Delivery chain of social protection

Source: Based on Barca and Hebbar in Schuering and Loewe 2021

To improve the distribution process, South Africa changed from cash payments to electronic payments for social benefits. Over a half of the recipients access these benefits electronically, and the majority of these recipients are using a mobile phone to do so. This is a notable achievement in that the social grant programme in South Africa is permanent and covers approximately 17.4 million beneficiaries. But still almost half of the beneficiaries do not have the chance of reaching the transfers via an electronic way (Schüring and Loewe 2021; Republic of South Africa 2019). In contrast to South Africa, Angola mentions challenges regarding the monitoring of the ongoing social protection Programmes. The problem arises on a heterogeneous carpet of social protection initiatives, which are not uniformly evaluated and accompanied during the program period (Governo de Angola 2021). Also, in Eswatini's VNR is stated that the orphanage and vulnerable children's fund has limited impact due to poor screening and targeting (Kingdom of Eswatini 2022).

While countries with mature systems place emphasis on all functions underlying the delivery chain, the lack of administrative capacity and resources, in particular, continue to be key bottlenecks in building robust systems (Clement 2020). Moreover, Malawi has specifically identified corruption as a critical issue, noting that it has negatively affected the performance of poverty eradication programs across the country, including Social protection programmes (Republic of Malawi 2022). The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score of Malawi is 34, slightly higher than the East African average of 31.5 (Transparency International 2022). This low overall CPI score serves as an indicator of a heightened corruption problem prevalent in several countries throughout the region, not exclusive to Malawi. This challenge further complicates the implementation of a universal social protection scheme, particularly when the state is designated as the primary provider.

4.5 Informality

Informal workers, a highly heterogeneous group, operate under difficult and precarious working conditions often without contracts, social protection, and labour rights. In 2015, the International Labour Conference adopted Recommendation No. 204 which emphasizes the need to move out of informality in order to promote decent work for all (ILO 2015). Riisgaard, Mitullah and Torm (2021) recognize a move towards a more unified social protection approach in Kenya and Tanzania which encompasses in some degree informal workers.

In contrast, Du Toit and Neve (2014) recommend moving away from a normative scenario of what should be. Instead, it would be more advisable to analyse the actual value creation, both politically and socially,

of marginalized people (Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021). Fafchamp (2004) also confirmed that the informal sector is not a problem, but researchers and academics do not understand the mechanisms of this market. Therefore, western societies refer to working models that are organized outside of legal rules as informal (Clement 2020). Nonetheless, the central goal according to the ILO to effectively cover informal workers with social protection measures is the transition from informality to formality. In theory, there is a widespread perception that formalising the labour sector and opening social insurance schemes can better protect people in informal employment. Alongside policies of formalization, social protection tools like cash transfers and contributory insurances are being promoted to extend social protection coverage to the informal economy. However, it is not clear how effective this method is in practice. A new approach, however, would be to offer people in informal employment the opportunity to represent themselves alongside formal companies and employees, to create innovative instruments (Riisgaard, Mitullah, and Torm 2021; Clement 2020).

In Nigeria, the N-Power Programme strives to enhance the job-related skills of young adults aged 18 to 35, with the goal of transitioning them from the informal sector to formal employment (Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2020).

5 Conclusion

Despite marked advancements, the current status of social protection in Africa ranks among the lowest globally, a reality mirrored in the region's elevated poverty levels. Notably, North and South Africa lead in effective social protection coverage, particularly for specific target groups like the elderly. However, the overall social protection system remains weak compared to global standards as is the level of social protection expenditure, which compares unfavorably to other regions. Vulnerable populations, including women, children, individuals with disabilities, rural population and displaced persons, face notable exclusion in both legal frameworks and formal access channels. Ongoing challenges such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural hazards, and armed conflicts pose unprecedented risks to the attainment of previously established objectives.

Despite notable strides, the current state of social protection in Africa ranks among the lowest globally, a reality underscored by the region's heightened levels of poverty. While North and South Africa lead in effective social protection coverage, particularly for specific demographics like the elderly, the overall system falls short of global standards, mirrored in inadequate expenditure compared to other regions. Vulnerable populations, encompassing women, children, individuals with disabilities, rural inhabitants, and displaced persons, encounter substantial exclusion in both legal frameworks and formal access channels. Ongoing challenges, including the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and armed conflicts, pose unprecedented risks to established objectives.

To bolster the practical implementation of social protection floors and associated recommendations in Africa, governments must execute meticulously planned strategies addressing critical oversights. Drawing from the findings of an exploratory study on Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), the initiation of comprehensive action plans for each country is imperative, prescribing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) social protection measures. Given the intricacies outlined in the study, governments should focus on addressing key impediments like informality, financing gaps, and ineffective system design. Country-specific strategies must proactively manage external factors threatening sustainability, mitigating risks to SDG1, particularly SDG1.3, and the objectives of the AU Agenda 2063.

To achieve higher levels of social protection through both social assistance and social insurances, a rigorous, operational implementation of ILO Recommendation No. 202 is imperative. African governments need to ensure immediate physical and financial access to essential services by formalizing prevalent forms of social protection. To enhance the effectiveness of social protection measures in Africa, a shift towards adopting the lifecycle approach (LCA) is crucial, strategically allocating resources to extend focus beyond

the early and late stages of life, incorporating critical events like displacement or pregnancy within non-contributory social protection systems. Additionally, recognizing gender-related differences is essential in research and the implementation of social protection systems, particularly regarding various life-cycle events. Reducing inequalities within target groups, especially between formal and informal workers, is paramount for achieving the overarching goal of SDG1 - Ending Poverty.

Comprehensive data for the indicator SDG1.3.1 is essential, and to streamline data collection processes in Africa, leveraging up-to-date information and qualitative methods should be prioritized to address data gaps. Accessible data assists policymakers and citizens in understanding the state of social protection and the significance of poverty reduction through a comprehensive social protection system. Building a network with key stakeholders is crucial to initiating systematic changes for a cohesive social protection framework aligned with the overarching goal of achieving substantial coverage for the poor and vulnerable by 2030, as outlined in SDG1.3. Collaborations among African nations can be facilitated through the establishment of regional forums or working groups focused on social protection strategies, regular meetings for the exchange of successful policies and approaches, and the development of joint initiatives to address common challenges, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, inflation, and armed conflicts.

However, achieving these goals necessitates a sustainable and shock-resistant financing strategy. Regions with high investments in social protection measures have lower poverty rates, and Africa, with the least investment in social protection systems, requires a strategic allocation of resources. Governments must conduct a comprehensive review of social protection expenditure, including a thorough assessment of the current social protection budget to identify inefficiencies and areas of low impact for potential reallocation.

In summary, the attainment of a comprehensive social protection system hinges on various factors, requiring interventions in multiple areas, some of which are only partially covered in this report. The recommendation emphasizes the urgency of tailored interventions aligned with each country's unique socio-economic context, fostering a more effective and sustainable realization of social protection goals.

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